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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000493

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/21/2021

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: BRV OFFICIALS DEMAND RESPECT FROM VISITING WHA/AND OFFICERS

REF: CARACAS 461

Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(b).

Summary

11. (C) During an orientation visit by WHA/AND Director, Deputy Director, and Desk Officer, senior Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) officials echoed the common theme of wanting improved bilateral relations based on respect for sovereignty. Rene Arreaza, chief of staff to Vice President Rangel, expressed doubt that Venezuela would obtain a seat on the UN Security Council and admitted the BRV was failing at Bolivarian higher education. National Assembly President Nicolas Maduro complained about Secretary Rice's recent comments on Venezuela the day before, but also expressed hope that the Boston Group could be resurrected as a "bridge of communication." Vice Foreign Minister Mari Pili Hernandez said she would formally request a clarification from the USG over the Secretary's comments, and attacked the NGO Sumate for illegally acting as if it were a registered political party. Though these meetings offered little new substance, we note the Chavistas were uncharacteristically eager to appear open to Washington officials. End summary.

12. (SBU) WHA/AND Director Philip French, Deputy Director for Venezuela Bruce Friedman, and Venezuela Desk Officer Julie Danielewski made an orientation visit to Venezuela February 14-18. In addition to opposition and civil society leaders, the group had official meetings on February 17 with the Vice President's Chief of Staff, Rene Arreaza; National Assembly President Nicolas Maduro; and Vice Foreign Minister for North American and International Organization Affairs Mari Pili Hernandez. Ambassador Brownfield and Poloff accompanied for the official meetings.

Rene Arreaza: ECOSOC, Not UNSC

13. (C) Rene Arreaza expressed doubt that Venezuela would obtain a seat on the UN Security Council. Arreaza opined

that an ECOSOC seat would be more fitting for Venezuela's current foreign policy of promoting social justice for the poor. Asked about the BRV's most significant shortcomings, Arreaza indicated that Mision Sucre, which readies other Mision graduates for college, was a failure. Bureaucracy and incompetence had made a mess of the new Bolivarian universities, he said. Interestingly, Arreaza commented that Cuba's 20,000 person medical contingent had dwindled to 15,000, as some are apparently trying to either assimilate into Venezuela or, more likely, make their way to the United States or other countries in the region. He noted the BRV's long-term plans to train up Venezuelan doctors to replace the Cubans one day.

Nicolas Maduro: Boston Group Worth Another Shot

14. (C) Nicolas Maduro began by reading the transcript from Secretary Rice's remarks the previous day regarding the

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development of a new diplomatic front against President Hugo Chavez. He said such a policy of trying to isolate Venezuela would only lead to a "big dead end." He also took exception with the Secretary's mention of the need for international solidarity with a truck driver strike in Caracas, which he characterized as a minor event that happens with regularity. (Note: Maduro is a labor leader who comes from the public transportation workers sector.) The Ambassador recalled that Chavista groups expressed solidarity with last December's transportation strike in New York. He noted that President Chavez made regular comments about USG policy and leadership. The Ambassador added, however, that while our governments

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will not agree on many issues, it is beneficial to maintain working level contacts. French reiterated that the USG is dedicated to having good relations with Venezuela, but that it would require mutual respect. (Note: After the meeting, Maduro made multiple press statements in which he decried a new CIA plot via the transport workers to destabilize the government, while curiously characterizing our meeting as "positive" at the same time.)

15. (C) Maduro spoke favorably of the Boston Group, a U.S.-Venezuelan congressional cooperation group, and called it a "bridge of communication" that was worth preserving. He noted that in recent months both the U.S. and Venezuelan sides had let interest in the group wane, but suggested some effort to revive it. Ambassador Brownfield raised the need to keep the bi-partisan nature of the group, something that would be difficult now that the National Assembly was 100-percent Chavista. Maduro suggested they could include representatives from the allied parties Podemos and Patria Para Todos. The Ambassador suggested a new attempt to jump start the Boston Group could be made utilizing the International Visitor Program, sending some deputies to the United States to consult with their counterparts.

Mari Pili Hernandez: Sumate As a Political Party

16. (C) VM Hernandez began by saying that she had been instructed at the last minute to change her planned agenda for the meeting to include a rejection of Secretary Rice's statement. Hernandez noted that not two days had passed since the positive meeting between A/S Shannon and Amb. Bernardo Alvarez before this latest attack on Venezuela took place. She added that she would be sending a formal request for clarification (which the Embassy received on February 21). Hernandez raised the Sumate case, taking the emerging BRV line that the electoral NGO's sin was not that it received funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, but rather that it was acting like a political party during a

2002-2003 signature drive to force a recall vote on President Chavez (ref), in violation of the law. Hernandez also said she hoped to give the USG a response soonest on the latest round of modifications to the counter-narcotics agreement.

Comment

17. (C) Arreaza is the Embassy's best BRV ambassadorial contact, principally because he is a pragmatist who can separate himself from the politics. Maduro and Hernandez, on the other hand, are much more ideological. Maduro, in fact, had never before agreed to meet with the Ambassador (who was not technically invited to this meeting but joined at the last minute). We note that the BRV had agreed to these meetings at the same time that Venezuelan Ambassador Bernardo Alvarez was seeking a meeting with A/S Shannon in Washington (which took place February 14), suggesting the Chavistas were leveraging for reciprocal treatment.

18. (U) WHA/AND Officers were able to review this message.
WHITAKER